

NURSETALK: The Latest Addition to the Information Highway

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ABSTRACT

NURSETALK is an electronic bulletin board system (BBS) developed to provide information and meet the communication needs of three different nursing organizations in North Carolina. It was designed and conceptualized from a user perspective to promote functionality and acceptance.

INTRODUCTION

In these times of cost containment, limited resources and rapid change, nurses are seeking effective methods to communicate ideas, share resources, and disseminate information relevant to the profession. Even with differing specialty foci, some issues and information are relevant to all practitioners.

BBSs offer an alternative to traditional communication methods and exemplify another way for nurses to utilize the power of the personal computer. The implementation of many BBSs has not, however, resulted in consistent usage by members of the targeted population.

These systems tend to be initiated by a single individual who perceives a need and implements his/her response to that perception. Many times this individual perspective, regardless of rationality, limits the acceptance of the system by the group [1].

To change this pattern of poor usage, decisions about content and structure need to be based on a user perspective. Because most nurses have limited experience with personal computers, the program also needs to provide a clear and intuitive environment for use.

PROJECT METHODOLOGY

NURSETALK is a BBS used primarily by nurses across North Carolina. It is a creative and cost effective application of computer technology to encourage and expedite communication within and between members of three organizations: the North Carolina Consortium of Sigma Theta Tau Chapters (the Consortium), the North Carolina Nurses Association (NCNA) and the North Carolina League for Nursing (NCNLN).

The original system was developed for the Consortium. However, economic and manpower problems forced the BBS to be unavailable for over a year. Members of the Consortium and the newly

formed Council on Nursing Informatics of the NCNA requested reimplementing of the BBS. Rather than reinstate the existing system, a decision was made to start the development process from the beginning.

Development decisions were referred to a group of twelve nursing graduate students with minimal computer experience. This design group contained members from the three organizations. Their initial design and content decisions included structures for organizational information, an events calendar, forums, and shareware download facilities. Their purpose for the BBS was to provide information and enhance communication. Forums would allow users to participate in discussions or to ask pertinent questions of their colleagues [2,3].

Data and information were collected for inclusion in the BBS. Shareware selection was done through a group process and using compiled software rating scores. Forum topic selection occurred through group consensus after a review of nursing and lay literature on current issues.

The design and implementation of NURSETALK utilized group process and input. The result is a system that is based on a user's perspective and, hopefully, a user's needs. Whether to retrieve information, dialogue with one another about ideas, or access shareware, NURSETALK is a viable BBS for nurses of North Carolina.

References

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